

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8173

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 13056

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR IN PK

SUBJECT: US-INDIA RELATIONS: IMPACT OF MILITARY SALES TO PAKISTAN

1. DURING THE COURSE OF CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE DCM ON THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 1, BETWEEN THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS STAFFDEL MANTEL IN THE AFTERNOON, AND BETWEEN THE DCM AND TEJA, SEPTEMBER 2, SEVERAL REFERENCES WERE MADE TO US-INDIA RELATIONS AND MILITARY SALES TO PAKISTAN. THESE REMARKS ON MILITARY SALES WERE NOTEWORTHY FOR THEIR RESTRAINT ALTHOUGH A CLEAR MESSAGE CAME THROUGH THAT US MILITARY SALES BEYOND A CERTAIN POINT WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON US-INDIA RELATIONS, A THEME WHICH WAS PARALLELED BOTH IN RESTRAINT AND IN THE CAUTION FOR THE FUTURE IN ALMOST STAFFDEL MANTEL'S CONVERSATIONS IN DELHI.

2. MEHTA'S CONVERSATION WITH THE DCM PRIMARILY

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RELATED TO THE COLOMBO CONFERENCE. HE DIGRESSED

REGARDING INDIA'S PROBLEMS WITH BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN IN WAYS WHICH, PARTICULARLY IN LIGHT OF SUCCEEDING CONVERSATIONS, BECAME RELEVANT TO US-INDIA RELATIONS. AFTER DESCRIBING THE STATUS OF INDIA'S PROBLEMS WITH BANGLADESH, MEHTA SAID THAT WHILE HE DID NOT WISH TO SPEAK OFFICIALLY, HE VERY MUCH HOPED THAT SOMETHING MIGHT BE DONE TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE US DOES NOT REJOICE IN THE DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND INDIA. THE DCM REPLIED, OF COURSE, THAT EXCEPT FOR ECONOMIC MATTERS THE US HAD REFRAINED FROM US INVOLVEMENT IN BANGLADESH'S AFFAIRS. WE REPORT THIS TO INDICATE THAT MEHTA, WHOM WE BELIEVE IS SEEKING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THE US, STILL BELIEVES HE NEEDS HELP IN DEMONSTRATING US BONA FIDES IN BANGLADESH.

3. SHIFTING TO PAKISTAN, MEHTA SPECULATED ABOUT PAKISTAN'S MOTIVES IN REGARD TO RECENT STATEMENTS CONCERNING KASHMIR. HE WONDERED IF THEY WERE MADE FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION OR IF THEY REPRESENTED SOMETHING MORE SERIOUS. IN ANY EVENT, HE SAID, ALTHOUGH INDIA HAS SO FAR REFRAINED FROM ANY COMMENT, IT CANNOT DO SO INDEFINITELY. (DELHI IS A BIT NERVOUS ABOUT ITS SOMEWHAT SHAKY POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH SHEIKH ABDULLAH AT PRESENT AND MAY BE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO BHUTTO'S COMMENTS ABOUT KASHMIR IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES.) THEN MEHTA ASKED RHETORICALLY IF SOME METHOD MIGHT NOT BE FOUND BY WHICH THE ANXIETIES OF THE SUBCONTINENT COULD BE ASSUAGED.

4. MEHTA TOOK HIS ANALYSIS OF THE PAKISTAN PROBLEM SOMEWHAT FARTHER WHEN SPEAKING TO MANTEL. HE DESCRIBED THE REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE RECENT AGREEMENT WITH PAKISTAN AND ITS RAPID IMPLEMENTATION BUT AGAIN DESCRIBED RECENT STATEMENTS IN PAKISTAN ABOUT KASHMIRE WHICH HE SAID RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT PROSPECTS OF THE FUTURE. IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT HE MADE HIS ONLY COMMENT ON US MILITARY SALES TO PAKISTAN. HE SAID THAT THE SALE OF SOME OFFENSIVE WEAPON SUCH AS THE A-7 COULD START THE CYCLE OF

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INDIA-PAKISTAN ACTIONS AND REACTIONS GOING AGAIN, AND WOULD HAVE "POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE." BY THE LATTER, HE MEANT IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE PAKISTANIS (AS ALSO THE INDIANS) AS INDICATING THEY HAD THE POLITICAL SUPPORT OF THE US. IT WOULD, MEHTA SAID, DAMAGE BOTH INDIA-PAKISTANI RELATIONS AND INDIA-US RELATIONS. IT SEEMS TO US SIGNIFICANT THAT, DESPITE THE FACT THAT MANTEL STARTED THE

CONVERSATION BY DESCRIBING HIS SPECIFIC INTEREST
IN THE MILITARY SALES PROGRAM, MEHTA OFFERED ONLY
THIS SINGLE COMMENT ON US SALES.

5. THE NEXT DAY TEJA WAS SOMEWHAT MORE SPECIFIC
REGARDING US MILITARY SALES BUT STILL RESTRAINED. IF
US ARMS SUPPLY TO PAKISTAN IS OF SUFFICIENT
QUANTITY TO HAVE "POLITICAL IMPACT", HE SAID, IT
WILL CAUSE CONCERNS IN INDIA. HE MENTIONED
SPECIFICALLY A-7S OR TANKS. HE RECOGNIZED, HOWEVER,
THAT THE US HAD GONE SLOW IN SALES IN RECENT YEARS;
HE ALSO NOTED THAT SO FAR THE US WAS OFFERING ARMS
ONLY FOR CASH SALE. TEJA ALSO MENTIONED THE
RE-EMERGENCE OF KASHMIR ISSUE IN PAKISTAN, MAKING
CLEAR THAT HIS CONCERN ABOUT THE POLITICAL IMPACT
OF US ARMS SALES RELATED TO SUCH THINGS AS PAKISTAN'S
ATTITUDE TOWARD NEGOTIATIONS WITH INDIA. THE DCM
EXPLAINED THAT US SALES HAD INDEED BEEN MODEST
AND SAID THAT MANY PEOPLE QUESTIONED WHY INDIA
WAS CONCERNED ABOUT US SALES WHEN IT HAD SUCH
EXTENSIVE FOREIGN SOURCES ITSELF AND WAS CLEARLY MILITARILY
SUPERIOR. TEJA DID NOT PRESS THE ISSUE PERHAPS
BECAUSE, AS HE HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD MANTEL, THE
GOI DID NOT WISH TO MAKE US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS THE
PRINCIPAL DETERMINANT OF US-INDIA RELATIONS.

6. THESE DISCUSSIONS LEAD US TO SEVERAL TENTATIVE
CONCLUSIONS. FIRST, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THERE
ARE THOSE HIGH IN THE GOI WHO CONTINUE TO BELIEVE
THAT THE US IS OPERATING AGAINST INDIA'S INTEREST
IN BOTH BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN; AND THERE ARE THOSE,
SUCH AS THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, WHO WOULD LIKE TO BE
ABLE TO PROVE THEM WRONG. SECOND, IT SEEMS CLEAR
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THAT TACTICALLY AT LEAST, THE GOI HAS BEEN
HANDLING THE ARMS ISSUE QUITE DIFFERENTLY FROM IN
THE PAST. IT HAS NOT COMPLAINED ABOUT MODEST SALES
AND, INDEED, HAS NOT YET MADE AN ISSUE WITH US IN
DELHI OF THOSE SALES WHICH ARE NOW BEFORE THE SENATE
COMMITTEE. THIRD, IT IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT THE
GOI SEES A LIMIT TO ITS RESTRAINT AND THE A-7
EXCEEDS THAT LIMIT. MANTEL WAS TOLD BY THE MEA
PLANNING JOINT SECRETARY (DAMODARAN) THAT INDIA
DID NOT SEE AN A-7 TRADE OFF FOR REPROCESSING
FACILITIES AS ACCEPTABLE IN ANY WAY. THERE ALSO
SEEMS TO BE A MUCH MORE VAGUELY DEFINED LIMIT WHICH
IS THAT QUANTITY OF ARMS SALES WHICH THE
INDIANS SEE AS AFFECTING PAKISTAN'S STANCE REGARDING
INDIA. IN THIS REGARD INDIAN OFFICIALS HAVE

MADE IT CLEAR THAT OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS TIMING
AND THE STATE OF US-INDIA RELATIONS WOULD HAVE AN
EFFECT ON THEIR REACTION TO US ARMS SALES. IF US-INDIA
RELATIONS WERE WARM AND A US ARMS SALE TO PAKISTAN
WAS NOT MADE AT A TIME OF INDIA-PAKISTAN DIFFICULTY,
INDIA MIGHT NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT IT.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 13056

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7. WE DON'T WANT TO EXAGGERATE THE IMPORTANCE
OF THIS DIALOGUE WHICH IN SOME REGARD RESEMBLES
THAT WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE OVER THE YEARS AND WHICH
WE OFTEN WOULD PREFER TO FORGET. WE DID NOTE,
HOWEVER, A TOUCH OF RESTRAINT AND A SUSPICION OF A
SLIGHTLY MORE TOLERANT ATTITUDE THROUGHOUT MANTEL'S
NUMEROUS MEETINGS IN DELHI. THIS MAY REPRESENT
CHANGE, OR BETTER TACTICS, OR SIMPLY THE VIEWS OF
INTELLIGENT INDIANS DURING RATIONAL MOMENTS.

8. WE WERE PARTICULARLY STRUCK BY THE RELAXED
INDIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD US ARMS SALES TO IRAN.
SEVERAL SENIOR MEA OFFICIALS (THOSE RESPONSIBLE
FOR PLANNING, SOVIET AFFAIRS, AND EVEN PAKISTAN)

AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR DEF STUDIES
AND ANALYSIS TOLD MANTEL THAT WHILE THEY DID NOT
NECESSARILY AGREE WITH IRAN'S FEARS WHICH ENGENDERED
ITS ARMS PURCHASES, NEITHER WERE THEY CONCERNED
ABOUT IRAN AS A STRATEGIC RIVAL IN THE FUTURE OR
AS A POTENTIAL ARMS SUPPLIER TO PAKISTAN. THE

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MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR SOVIET AFFAIRS REMARKED
THAT THE RUSSIANS HAD REPEATEDLY URGED THE DANGER
OF THE ARMS BUILDUP IN IRAN TO INDIA IN COVERSACTIONS
WITH GOI OFFICIALS AND HAD BEEN POLITELY TOLD THAT
THE INDIANS WERE NOT CONCERNED SINCE THEIR RELATIONS
WITH IRAN WERE NOW EXCELENT. EVEN ASSUMING AN
ELEMENT OF DISINGENUOUSNESS IN THIS ARGUMENT, IT
IS AT LEAST EVIDENT THAT INDIA IS NOT PREPARED TO
EXPRESS ANY COMPLAINT ABOUT IRANIAN PURCHASES TO THE
US OR IRAN ITSELF. SALES TO SAUDI ARABIA, ON THE
OTHER HAND, WERE POTENTIALLY RISKIER FOR INDIA --

OFFICIALS TOLD MANTEL -- SINCE THE SAUDIS MIGHT WELL
RASHLY COMMIT THEIR RESOURCES TO PAKISTANI ASSISTANCE.
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